Reform Support Network

Building Principal Capacity and Engagement for Reforms

Principal Professional Learning

January 2015

Purpose of This Document

Because principals are fundamentally important to the success of students, we believe there are actions States can take to foster policies that enable strong school leaders—not hinder them. This document identifies ways you, as State leaders, can improve policies and practices that build principal skills in observing teachers and developing instructional knowledge. Building those skills will allow principals to focus on implementing reforms to improve outcomes for students. The policies, tools and strategies outlined in this document can also reinforce a State's plan to improve principals' effective use of time—by training and supporting school leaders on how to use freed up time well to implement reform efforts.

As a process note, resources identified in Learning Module 1 (found in: *Building Principal Capacity and Engagement for Reforms: Improving the Use of Principal Time*) are also useful for principal professional learning. Examples include the following:

- **Louisiana** convened nearly 2,000 teachers representing every school across the State to two events in April and June 2013. The events served as an opportunity for teacher leaders, principals and district staff to share suggestions, plan and organize for the transition to Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The State uses a District Support Toolbox and Teacher Support Toolbox to keep the field apprised of implementation progress, disseminate resources and supports and share strategies for improving instructional practices. Teacher Leader resources and supports for CCSS can be found at http://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/louisiana-teacher-leaders.

- **EngageNY** serves as an online portal through which the New York State Education Department provides districts and schools access to curriculum and instructional resources, assessments and other related materials to help with the transition to the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards. These resources can be used to build expertise across school leadership teams and prevent the work of implementation from solely resting with the principal. Resources can be found online at www.engageny.org.

RESOURCES TO PREPARE TEACHERS FOR THE INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFT TO NEW STANDARDS

TOOLS TO USE

Online Resources

Achieve and the **U.S. Department of Education** have created a number of resources, including a workbook for State and district leaders, "**Implementing Common Core State Standards and Assessments**."

Achieve also developed action briefs on the roles of **elementary school** and **secondary school** leaders in implementing the CCSS. These briefs provide recommendations on how to increase awareness and create a sense of urgency with teachers, students and other stakeholders regarding how to implement the new standards.

Developed in partnership with Education First, Insight Education Group, Student Achievement Partners and Targeted Leadership Consulting, the implementation guide for school leaders from The **Aspen Institute**, "**Implementation of the Common Core State Standards: A Transition Guide for School-level Leaders**," is intended for use as a reference and an action-planning springboard for school leadership teams to ensure that high-quality CCSS are implemented in their schools. Built around seven indicators, the guide provides specific high-impact actions, measures and tools for implementation, and it includes three vignettes to illustrate how those indicators might appear in day-to-day practice. The guide tracks closely with the professional learning module "**The Role of Instructional Leadership Teams and Looking at Student Work**," also released in September 2013.

The **Achievement Network** developed a new paper, "**Focusing on the How: Guidance for School and District Leaders on Supporting Teachers Through the Transition to the Common Core**." This paper offers three rubrics developed through in-depth work with 460 diverse schools in underserved communities across seven States and the District of Columbia, as well as case studies to bring the ideas within these rubrics to life.

Additional tools and resources:

- **Achieve** developed **materials to help school leaders understand and implement the standards**, including **the American Diploma Project's Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQuiP) rubrics** to determine the quality and alignment of instructional lessons to CCSS.

- **America Achieves' Common Core website** provides lesson videos, editable lesson plans and professional development resources.

- The **Hunt Institute** created a series of **Common Core Videos for implementation**.

- **Learning Forward** created resources for effective professional development called "**Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core**," including professional learning units, innovation configuration maps and a workbook for States and districts.

- The **National Governors Association, The Council of Chief State School Officers, Achieve, the Council of the Great City Schools and the National Association of State Boards of Education** released the **Revised Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3–12**.

- **Student Achievement Partners** disseminates materials through its **Website Achieve the Core**.

State or District Examples

Tennessee developed an online **Common Core Leadership Course** (which formed some of the content for an in-person "Leadership 101" Course) for principals, assistant principals and district supervisors. The course was designed to give an overview of the standards, offer ideas for professional development for school staff and provide the opportunity to collaborate with peers on how to implement standards. The course is available at the TNCORE Website. The username for the site is: "tneducation" and the password is "fastestimproving."

RESOURCES TO BUILD PRINCIPAL SKILL TO OBSERVE TEACHERS AND PROVIDE ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK

TOOLS TO USE

Online Resources

The **TNTP** pilot light project focuses on promising human capital initiatives that are working towards larger reforms. Each profile highlights concrete steps taken by schools, districts and States to elevate the teaching profession and advance student learning. In "**Pilot Lights: Giving Teachers Useful Feedback**," Achievement Prep demonstrates how principals can build structures to systematically provide useful feedback. Achievement Prep structures feedback around "quick hits"— small, manageable pieces of a teacher's craft that could be easily improved. At least once every two weeks, all 18 teachers receive a short, 15-minute observation and a real-time follow-up email.

Researchers from the **Measures of Effective Teaching** (**MET**) Project recently talked about its "observation engine," an online tool to improve the reliability of classroom observations conducted by administrators and other observers. Jess Wood of D.C. Public Schools also referred to this tool during an **SCEE-hosted webinar on evaluating teacher practice**.

State or District Examples

Rhode Island created a set of **online modules** to train principals on a variety of topics related to teacher evaluation and support. The new modules allow the State to impart consistent and accurate messages on complex topics to evaluators during in-person sessions. The online nature of the modules also allows principals to use the videos with their staff upon their return from the training. This combined approach allows Rhode Island to get the benefits of conversation and engagement from their in-person interactions as well as the consistency of online trainings.

Minnesota provides programs, support and technical assistance to schools that are implementing Minnesota statutes through the use of professional development best practices. These practices focus on improving teacher effectiveness and increasing student achievement. They establish high-quality district and school staff development programs and activities, support teacher leaders and provide mentoring for probationary teachers and teacher evaluation and support systems. **Online** job-embedded professional development modules exist.

Kentucky put together "Year-At-A-Glance" calendars, which provide an overview of the monthly tasks necessary for **superintendents**, **principals** and **teachers** to roll out new educator evaluation and support systems. It also hosts online "**office hours**" twice a week where State officials are on hand to answer educator questions. Finally, the State developed a number of professional learning modules, including "**Professional Learning for Peer Observers**," which the State developed with their partner, Kentucky Educational Television (KET).

In **Ohio**, the **Ohio Student Progress Portal Website** provides a variety of tools and solutions to educators in Ohio to improve teacher effectiveness and student growth. The Website has a publicly accessible section that provides valuable information, case studies and videos about formative instructional practices, the use of value added data to improve student growth and information about Race to the Top programs.

RESOURCES TO BUILD MULTIPLE AND SPECIFIC PRINCIPAL SKILLS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

TOOLS TO USE

Online Resources

Learning Forward created a publication entitled, "Framework for Improvement: Effective School Leadership Translates into Increased Student Learning," to address specific skill building areas for improving principal practice.

The **Wallace Foundation** provides a new look at the people responsible for providing professional feedback and learning to principals—their supervisors. "Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors," provides a detailed look at the principal supervisor role and finds that these administrators often face daunting problems in carrying out their jobs effectively, including having to oversee too many schools (an average of 24). The report offers recommendations for how districts can improve matters. One suggestion is matching supervisors with schools suitable to their skills and expertise.

LeaderSet, a collaborative effort of New Leaders and Pearson Education, includes evaluation training for principal managers based on the work developed by New Leaders' district and State services groups. This blog post by Ben Fenton, chief strategy officer at New Leaders, and Kelly Burling, director at Pearson, discusses what guidance and orientation districts should offer to principal managers. You can read more at http://researchnetwork.pearson.com/educator-effectiveness/principals-need-great-evaluation-and-development-too.

State or District Examples

In **Ohio**, the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council created a **Leadership Development Framework**, which identifies the most essential leadership practices across six areas that outline what the superintendent, district leadership team and building leadership team need to do to improve instructional practice and student performance:

- Data and the Decision-Making Process

- Focused Goal Setting Process

- Instruction and the Learning Process

- Community Engagement Process

- Resource Management Process

- Board Development and Governance Process

These core leadership practice areas are outlined in the framework and provide the foundation for Ohio's improvement process, as well as the online performance assessment and professional development that are universally accessible to all districts in Ohio.

States can also do a better job of using Federal resources to support educator development. According to data from the Center for American Progress, there is little evidence that Title II funds are being used well.[1] Further, the vast majority of these funds are not being spent on principal effectiveness activities. In a representative sample of 800 local educational agencies (LEAs), just four percent of Title II funds were reportedly spent on professional development for administrators as compared to 40 percent for teachers and paraprofessionals.[2]

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[1] Robin Chait and Raegen Miller, "Ineffective Uses of ESEA Title II Funds: Funding Doesn't Improve Student Achievement," Center for American Progress (2009), http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2009/08/04/6490/ineffective-uses-of-elementary-and-secondary-education-act-title-ii-funds/.

[2] http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/resources.html.

RESOURCES TO BUILD MULTIPLE AND SPECIFIC PRINCIPAL SKILLS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING (Continued)

The balance of funds was spent on reducing class size (31 percent), recruiting top talent and retaining great educators. While there are fewer principals than teachers, the current investment in principals fails to recognize a principal's impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

States can provide examples of ways to use Federal Title II funding to help more LEAs effectively spend funds on professional development. In order to receive Title II, Part A funds, LEAs must conduct "an assessment of local needs for professional development and hiring" (ESEA §2122(c)) and submit an application to the State education agency (SEA) based on that needs assessment and describing the activities the LEA will use Title II funds to support (ESEA §2122(a)). One often overlooked requirement, is that the application must also include "a description of how the activities will be based on a review of scientifically based research and an explanation of why the activities are expected to improve student academic achievement" (ESEA §2122(b)(1)(B)). SEAs can use this application requirement to focus LEAs in restricting funding to activities that meet this definition and limit activities that do not.

For example, in **Michigan**, the State clarified that while LEAs have flexibility in the use of their Title II, Part A funds, they should only use the funds for the specific kinds of class size reduction initiatives that have been shown, through scientifically based research, to improve student achievement.

The State's guidance for use of Title II, Part A funds for class size reduction clarifies that while LEAs have flexibility in the use of their Title II, Part A funds—as long as they use those funds consistent with local planning requirements and the LEAs' needs assessments—LEAs should only use the funds for the specific kinds of class size reduction initiatives that have been shown, through scientifically based research, to improve student achievement. Based on the findings of several seminal class size reduction studies, Michigan provided the following guidance to their LEAs: Reducing class size should take place in kindergarten through third grade, class sizes should be reduced to 17 or fewer, funds should only support classes taught by highly-qualified teachers who adjust instruction accordingly, funds should focus on schools with high-needs students and initiatives should be sustained so that students are in a reduced class for at least two years. More information on that guidance and relevant research can be found online at the Michigan Department of Education's Website.